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ABSTRACT

The document reports on a study conducted to investigate value-clusters of Mexican American and Anglo American boys as related to self-concept and to achievement since it is the author's belief that typical elementary education does not meet the needs of Mexican American children. As noted, profitable remedies for the dilemma of underachievement are not yet available because educators do not understand the underlying causes of this or may not be willing to admit the failure of the schools. Specifically, the study investigated differences and/or similarities in the value-clusters of 3 groups of boys (50 in each group) of similar ages, intelligence, and socioeconomic status, differing only in reading achievement and/or in ethnicity. Among the conclusions drawn from the study were that (1) significant differences in self-concepts, values, and role conceptions exist between Mexican American and Anglo American boys; (2) underachieving Mexican American boys do not perceive themselves as more negative than their better-achieving peers; and (3) Mexican American boys do not have lower occupational aspirations than Anglo American boys. Of equal importance are the implications for development of more realistic and appropriate educational and cultural school programs. (EJ)

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SELF-CONCEPTS, VALUES, AND NEEDS OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN UNDERACHIEVERS

or

(MUST THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN CHILD ADOPT A SELF-CONCEPT THAT FITS THE AMERICAN SCHOOL?)

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PROBLEM:

It has been generally admitted that existing programs in the typical elementary class do not meet the needs and requirements of Mexican-American children, but profitable remedies have not yet been available, partially because reasons for the lack of achievement of these children are not readily admissible, or adequately understood by teachers and administrators. Nor have researchers been of assistance to them in comprehending these needs, having instead concentrated most of their efforts on contradictory investigations involving the cognitive differences between Mexican and Anglo children. Yet, even in spite of such cognitive studies, educators seem to have learned little--and are still being widely criticized for not adequately appraising the abilities of these children. Few studies have involved these children's perceptions or their affective development. It is, therefore, not surprising to find that teachers and administrators have thought erroneously that Mexican-American children perceive themselves as more negative than their Anglo peers. They have not examined their assumptions, which have been merely their own stereotyped views of these children, whom they cannot understand, for they do not seem to fit into their own middle-class cultural norms, values, and standards of behaviors.

To excuse teachers' lack of success with these children in the public schools, educators have attributed these youngsters' lack of achievement to such ambiguous causes or effects as "lowered capacity," "linguistic deficits," (though the large majority of the Spanish-surname pupils in these urban areas speak little or no Spanish), "economic disadvantages," due to fewer material assets which are valued by the middle-class Anglo school-culture. Finally, when nothing else explains away these childrens' "learning deficits," they have attributed them to the "unalterable influences" which the Mexican-American child brings from his home to the school, which are, of course, always assumed to be negative, since the families of these youngsters are believed to be indifferent to education and to the goals of the American elementary school.

Though a few studies, now and then, contradict these prejudicial opinions, educators still seem to persist in their stereotyped views, for these provide them with plausible explanations for the behavior and failure in school of Mexican-American children.

Strangely, teachers and administrators have refused to take a look at themselves, or to investigate the milieu of the school as a contributing factor to the lack of achievement of the Mexican-American pupil. The major target of change, if not the only one, in most programs, has been the child, whom educators have desperately sought to make over in their own image. Only when they look like them were they able to be rewarded.

PROBLEM (continued)

Yet many have resisted, either consciously or not. And the question is still paramount: is it really fair and just, or even reasonable, to force culturally-different children to become middle-class Anglos; or should we not instead minimize our influences upon them so that they can maintain their own cultural identity and integrity?

The literature has largely confined itself to merely stating that differences do exist between cultural groups, but it has not provided us with an understanding of the nature of such differences in qualitative terms. Therefore, a view has not been gained of how children of differing ethnic groups perceive and define their world, or ours, nor has it been discovered if and how these worlds might have discrepant values, needs, and goals.

It was one of the purposes of this study to see if one can relate successes and failures of students in divergent ethnic groups (and in differing achievement groups) to such discrepancies in values, self-concepts, and role-identifications between them, and between them and the school in which they are expected to function.

Another criticism of education for differing ethnic groups has been that methods are confusing and that curriculum-content is not sufficiently relevant or interesting to culturally-different children. The school has not tried to change to fit the needs of these children, even though pupils repeatedly state that their teachers do not understand them, or ignore them, that the classroom methods confuse them, and that there is little in the school curriculum which they find relevant, or with which they can even identify.

Samorra--almost ten years ago--accused the American school system of default--yet his protests are still largely ignored by educators who prefer to argue that the problem lies with the home culture. Institutional self-analysis has not been allowed, and empirical data in these areas have been strangely lacking.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

It was for these reasons that the present investigation was undertaken. It was sought to determine what Mexican-American under-achievers' value-clusters look like, and in what way they are different or similar to the value-clusters of Mexican-American achievers, and/or Anglo-American achievers.

The study also aimed at identifying the most common patterns of value-clusters of the Mexican-American Experimental group by correlating items on a self-inventory with membership in the ethnic or achievement group.

Finally, an analysis and interpretation was made of how under-achievement in reading might be influenced by these differences in value-clusters. The purpose was to see if Mexican-American achievers look more like Anglo achievers, or have values and aspirations more akin to those of

PURPOSE OF STUDY (continued)

other Mexican-American boys, even those underachieving in school. If there were differences between differently achieving Mexican-American boys, reasons for such were sought, which might assist the school in planning corrective educational strategies.

One such strategy was reported in this study, and an evaluation in terms of achievement-growth was attempted.

PROCEDURE

Three groups of boys (fifty in each group) of similar ages, intelligence, and socio-economic levels, differing only in achievement in reading (as measured by standardized tests) and/or in ethnicity--Mexican-American and Anglo-American--were compared on a Self-Concept Instrument, and on reading growth made over one school year in either the experimental reading program or in the typical elementary classroom reading instruction.

FINDINGS

The investigation uncovered significant differences in self-concepts, values, and role-conceptions between Mexican-American and Anglo-American boys, which influence their educational behaviors and achievements.

Forty-two statistically significant Chi-Squares were obtained in these comparisons; sixteen at the .001 level, ten at the .01 level, and sixteen at the .05 level.

Nine out of sixteen items in the section of the inventory concerned with SELF and IDEAL SELF CONCEPTS were able to show that the three groups of boys felt differently about a number of things important in their lives which might be considered to relate importantly to the standards and goals of the typical elementary classroom.

Aspirations of the Mexican-American Experimental group were markedly different from either of the two other groups, as their preference was for technical and formal occupations and endeavors, which the other boys did not favor.

Reading growth by the Mexican-American Experimental group in the "prescriptive reading program" was 13 months, as compared with .96 months for the Mexican-American achieving group and with 8 months for the Anglo-American achieving group in the regular classroom over the same period of time. While these numbers fall short of being statistically significant (t-test), we feel that the growth is nonetheless highly significant, especially when one recalls that these

FINDINGS (continued)

MAE's (Mexican-American Experimental Group) were considerably underachieving before entering the experimental reading program, and when one remembers that the achievement-deficits of these children are cumulative as they reach each higher grade.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Significant differences in self concepts, values, and role-conceptions were found to exist in this study between Mexican-American and Anglo-American boys of ages nine through thirteen, which influence their educational behaviors and achievements.

2. Some of the conclusions from this study with regard to educational values differed from those drawn from previous studies reported of Mexican-American pupils, for example:

   A. Contrary to stereotyped views, Mexican-American boys, EVEN THOUGH underachieving in school, do not perceive themselves as more negative than their Anglo peers, or even their better-achieving peers.

   B. Contrary to many educators' perceptions, Mexican-American boys, though underachieving in school, value grades and education, and do not consider themselves "dumb in schoolwork."

   C. Differing again from other studies, this investigation found evidence that Mexican-American boys not only do not have lower occupational aspirations than their Anglo peers, but in effect, evidenced higher occupational goals for themselves than the other groups with which they were compared.

   D. Mexican-American pupils in this study appeared more self-accepting than their Anglo peers or their achieving Mexican-American peers. There were no noticeable discrepancies between their real and their ideal selves, and therefore this is taken as another evidence of the lack of low self-esteem of these youngsters.

Some of the other conclusions based on the findings of comparisons of the three groups concerned adjustments, values, needs, and attitudes and relations with others. Among these, worth mentioning in summary were:

CONCLUSIONS (continued)

3. Mexican-American boys in this study appeared to have social adjustment surprisingly superior to that of their Anglo peers. They were also more realistic and mature in their aspirations than their Anglo peers.

4. Mexican-American boys, though from lower socio-economic environments, are not dissatisfied with their material status, differing here from Anglo boys from similar social-class backgrounds.

5. Mexican-American boys prefer to obey adults in authority, rather than to rebel against them, as is so often maintained. In fact, it is concluded that they depend on adults for their decisions and gain security from this adult exercise.

6. Findings point to a need of the Mexican-American boys to get along better with their parents, particularly with their fathers. On the other hand, there is some evidence among the boys in this group that the Mexican-American family is changing, in that the boys under investigation here are no longer overdependent on their mothers, but appear rather emancipated from them. In this study it is the Anglo boy who is over dependent on his mother.

Some of the findings more in agreement with data and conclusions from other investigators were:

7. Mexican-American boys are more active than their Anglo-peers, who are significantly more passive.

8. Mexican-American boys permit themselves strong sibling rivalry, and probably need to compete with their brothers and sisters for favors of their parents. Not so the Anglo boys in this experimentation.

9. Mexican-American boys aged nine through thirteen do not value "reading for its own sake" --a value featured in the typical American school. They also reject the American cultural value of "leadership."

10. Mexican-American boys do not feel they are as bright as their Anglo peers, and seem to have internalized and

CONCLUSIONS (continued)

accepted the school's view of them with regard to intelligence-- even when they are in reality as bright as the other boys.

11. Mexican-American underachievers are most significantly different in the areas compared in this study from the Anglo-American boys observed--while Mexican-American achieving boys are more like their Anglo counterparts than like their own ethnic peer-group.

12. The Adjustment Inventory used in this investigation lends itself well to investigations of self/ideal self-concepts and value-orientations of boys, when items in the inventory are examined and analyzed separately, and in relation to each other as recommended by its author (Carl Rogers). Considerable reliability was obtained in the study with the inventory, since several items in different sections featured similar values and attitudes, and yielded highly comparable results.

13. Finally, it appears that when an attempt is made to remedy the educational disadvantage of the Mexican-American boy in the American classroom and American school, by eliminating the value-discrepancies-it can be found that these boys will achieve a great deal more in reading than they would have, and did previously, in the typical reading program of the American elementary school.

EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

The lack of achievement of the Mexican-American boy is attributed to various sources of conflict between him and the American school. Among these are:

1. Some of the Mexican-American boys seem to have resisted the American school and culture by retaining a healthy, masculine, and certain identity, and by not allowing themselves to become "oversocialized" or assimialted. This extends to the values the boy has, the models he seeks to pattern himself after, his significant others, and those whom he seeks to avoid. These appear to clash with those desired by and inherent in the school-culture and its staff.

2. The highly informal, often ambivalent methods used in the American classrooms are markedly confusing to the Mexican-American boy, and at odds with his needs for structured, formal, technical learning, which he does not get in the regular elementary school-class.

EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS (continued)

3. The Mexican-American boy learns his role of socialization in a different manner than the Anglo boy does, and which the school assumes for all its pupil-clientele. He does not look to the female teacher nor to his mother, but to his peer-group for learning of standards of behavior and social roles. To please the school, or to function in the present-day school, this boy would have to give up his peer-group identification and his independence from his family in this regard. It is highly questionable if this requirement is psychologically healthy.

4. Finally, considered to be the most significant finding of this study, there is the remarkably well-integrated concept the Mexican-American boy has of himself, with little conflict between his real and ideal self-image, the feeling of personal worth, the feeling of having a real and distinct identity. The Anglo-American boy, on the other hand, a model-student-product of the American school and culture, has become so "oversocialized" that his identity has not only become ambivalent and uncertain, but he almost appears to have no identity at all. Instead he has taken on the one the school and society want him to have.

   The Mexican boy, on the other hand, does not seem to fit the requirements of the school in this area, for he appears to suffer from a lack of driveness and too little of the school-desired conflicts. He is too well-adjusted and self-accepting, as the clinician would say. Herein seems to lie one of his difficulties in the school.

In other words, we are saying that for the Mexican-American boy, self-validation is different than for the Anglo boy or the school, because his perceptions and responses differ. Therefore, he needs different learnings. He cannot learn in the same constricted, conforming manner as the Anglo boy is able to. His goals may be similar, but means to reach them are different. Therefore, the school must provide for these means. The school must learn what they are, and modify its systems sufficiently to make room for the needs and values of the Mexican-American student.

The burden of many criticisms of American culture, society (including the educational system) has been that some of its value-systems restrict human potential. If an ethnic group, such as the Mexican-American group, does not have the goodness of fit of its own value-orientations with that of the majority-culture, deviation-strains will result, some of them

EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS (continued)

serious, due to discrepant group-memberships of the individuals. We do not have the right, however, to force an individual boy in the school to alienate himself from the role-expectations of the school system or subsystem of which he is a member.

Therefore, we propose on the basis of the findings from this investigation, that the school must provide different learning environments for such youngsters. What is done in the schools must be re-examined, validated and offerings restyled. Teachers and administrators must be trained differently, so that they do not fear the different, or label them disadvantaged, when they are frequently advantaged. Teachers and administrators must learn to "tune in" on their community, and their culturally-different clientele before they can begin basic communication with these youngsters and their parents. Teachers and administrators must engage in a self-analysis not only of their offerings, but of their definitions of "learning," "achievement," "reading," and how they measure and evaluate these. And finally, they must stop to reward all those who have become like them, and punish or ignore those that appear different.